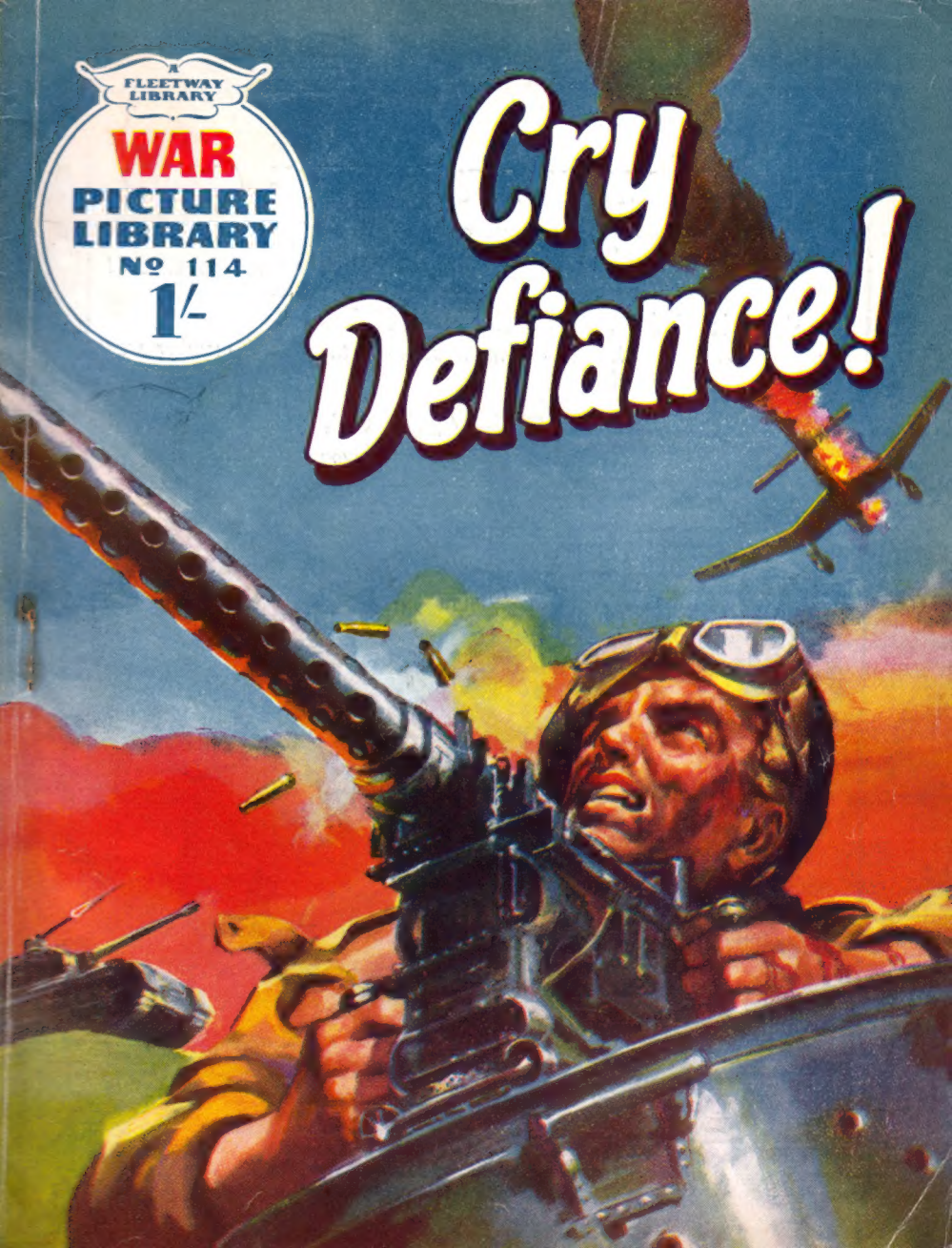
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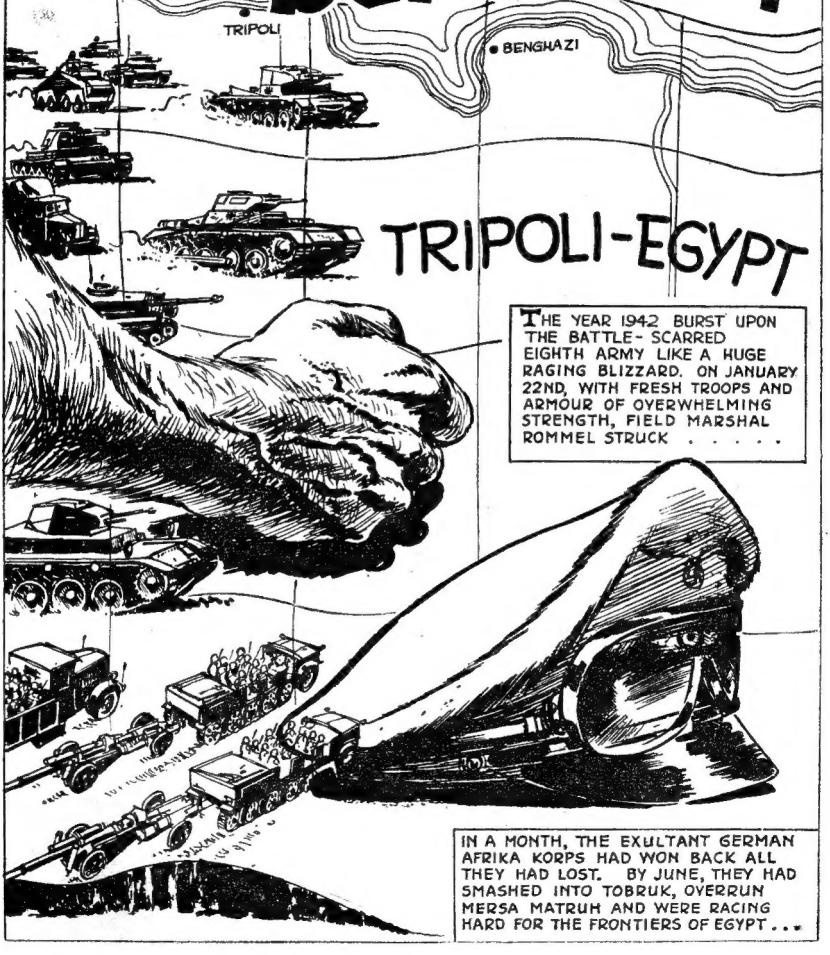

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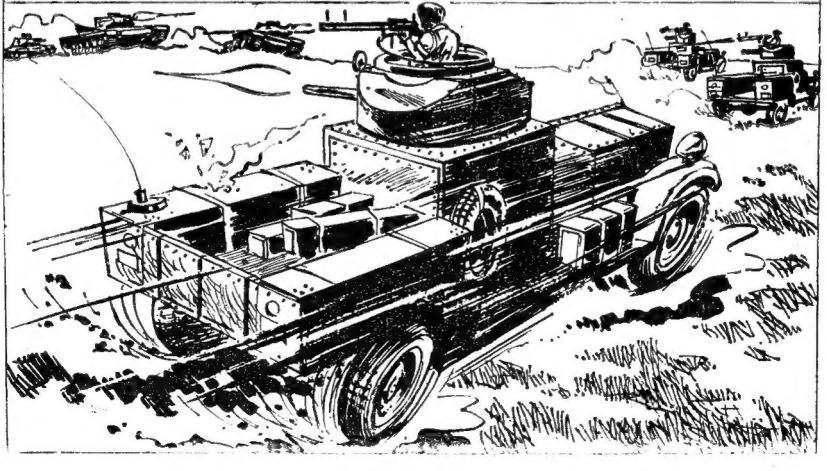
Chapter 1. FIGHTING RETREAT

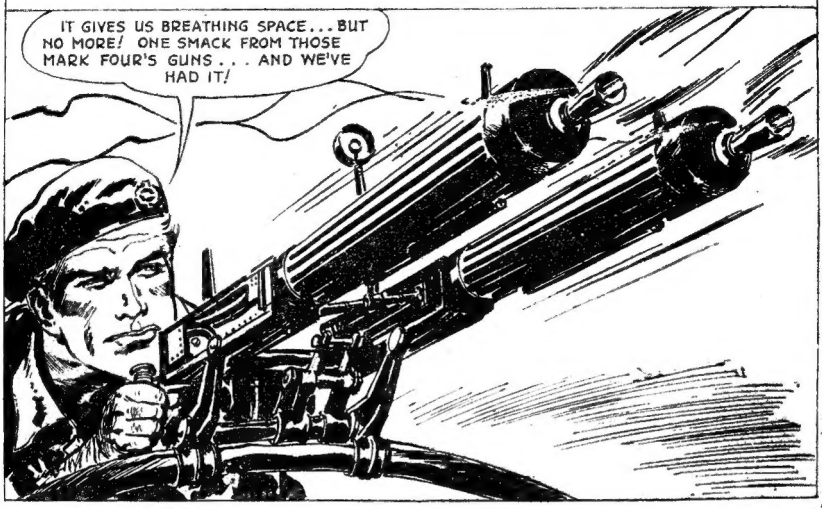
THREATENED BY THE PINCER MOVEMENTS OF THE ENEMY ARMOUR, SEVERAL UNITS OF THE EIGHTH ARMY WERE FORCED TO STRIKE SOUTH IN AN EFFORT TO BREAK THROUGH.

ENCUMBERED BY THEIR WOUNDED, HARRIED UNMERCIFULLY FROM THE AIR, THESE DOGGED REMNANTS OF A STILL PROUD ARMY SOUGHT THE REFUGE OF THE DESERT'S LONELY WASTELANDS.

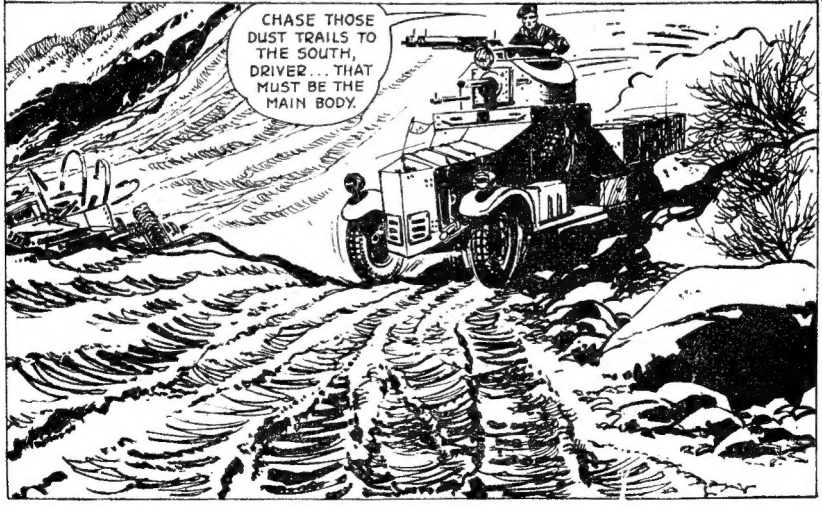
THE HOPES OF THE FUGITIVES WOULD HAVE BEEN SHORT-LIVED BUT FOR A FIGHTING REARGUARD ACTION BY A TROOP OF BRITISH ARMOURED CARS WHO HAMPERED THE PURSUIT WITH THE PUGNACITY OF TERRIERS.



COMMANDING ONE OF THESE SPEEDY CARS OF THE MODERN CAVALRY ARM WAS LIEUTENANT DAVID RUCKWORTH, A COOL ENOUGH FIGHTER EVEN IN THAT RAGING MOMENT.



THE RUNNING FIGHT HAD DRIVEN DAVE'S CAR FAR FROM ITS COMPANIONS AND, SLIPPING THE PURSUIT, HE DIRECTED HIS DRIVER INTO THE DEEP DESERT . . . . .



DRIVER CROSBIE TURNED THE CAR SOUTHWARDS AND ITS POWERFUL MOTOR ROARED LUSTILY . . . THEN FALTERED. PUZZLED, HE GLANCED DOWN AT THE FUEL GAUGE AND GAVE AN EXCLAMATION . . .
RUNNING OUT OF JUICE, SIR . .
DAVE SUDDENLY REMEMBERED WITH DISMAY THAT THEY HAD NOT REFUELLED THAT MORNING.

THE ARMOURED CAR RUMBLED TO AN OMINOUS STANDSTILL AND DAVE RUCKWORTH WATCHED GRIMLY WHILE GUNNER BARNES CONFIRMED THEIR FEARS . . .
I'LL SEE IF I CAN CALL SOMEBODY.
HARDLY A DROP, SIR. WE EMPTIED OUR SPARE CANS AT SIDI, REMEMBER?
WE WOULD BE MILES FROM ANYWHERE, OF COURSE!

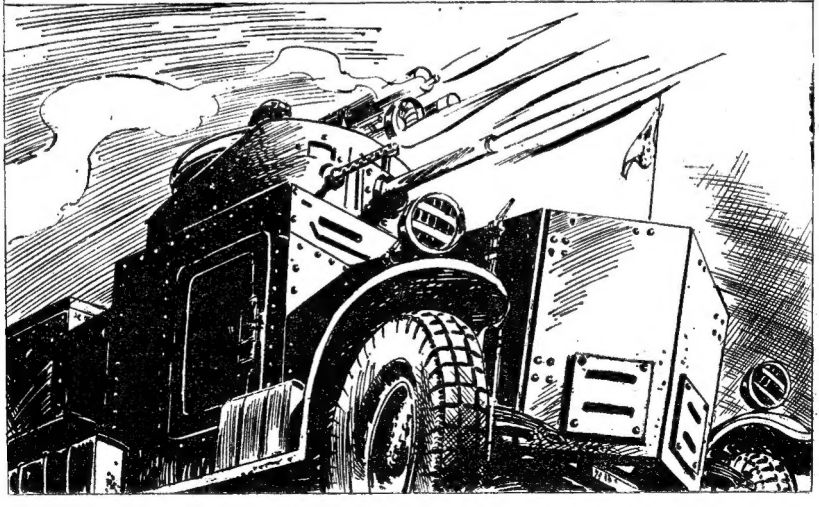
FOR LONG ANXIOUS MINUTES, DAVE CALLED ON THE TROOP WAVELENGTH. THEN, TO EVERYONE'S DEEP RELIEF, A REPLY CAME . . . IN TONES THAT WERE RECOGNISABLY ANGRY EVEN THROUGH THE DISTORTION.

CAPTAIN MONTAGUE WAYNE, LEADER OF THE TROOP, COULD HARDLY BE CALLED A PATIENT MAN.

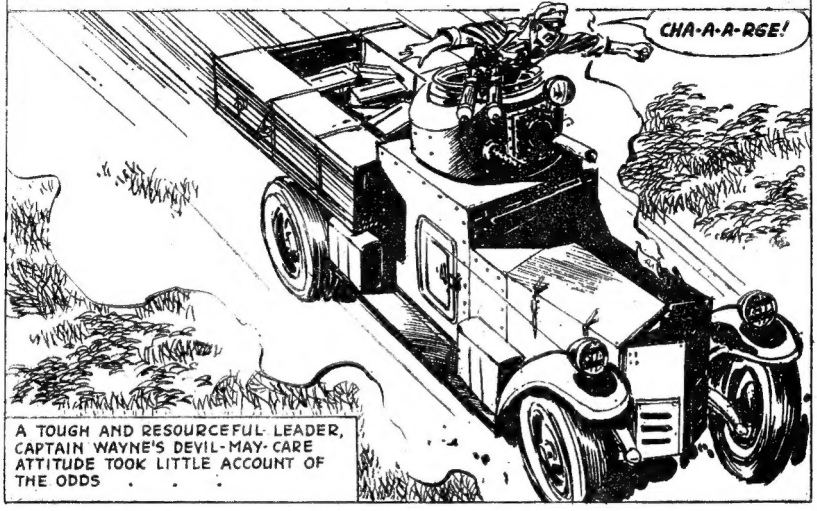
BUT IT WAS AN ENEMY FORCE THAT CAME UPON THE MAROONED ARMOURED CAR BEFORE THE RESCUE PARTY COULD GET THERE.

THE TWO ENEMY VEHICLES DISGORGED THEIR OCCUPANTS WHO FLUNG THEMSELVES DOWN INTO FIRING POSITIONS . . . . .

BUT BEFORE THEY COULD FIRE, THE BRITISH ARMOURED CAR ERUPTED INTO FURIOUS LIFE LIKE A HORNET'S NEST THAT HAS BEEN ROUSED.

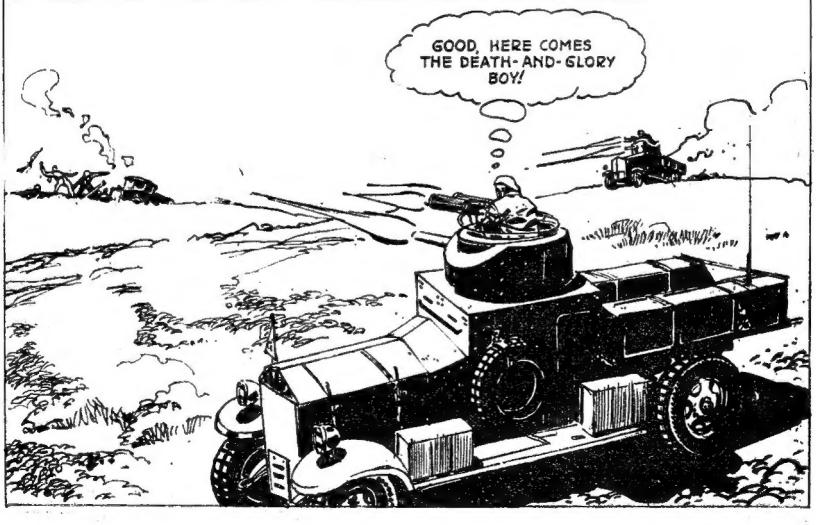


SPEEDING TOWARDS THE SCENE AND ALREADY WITHIN EARSHOT OF THE SHOOTING, WAS CAPTAIN MONTAGUE WAYNE'S CAR. HIS INSTANT REACTION WAS TYPICAL OF THE MAN . . .

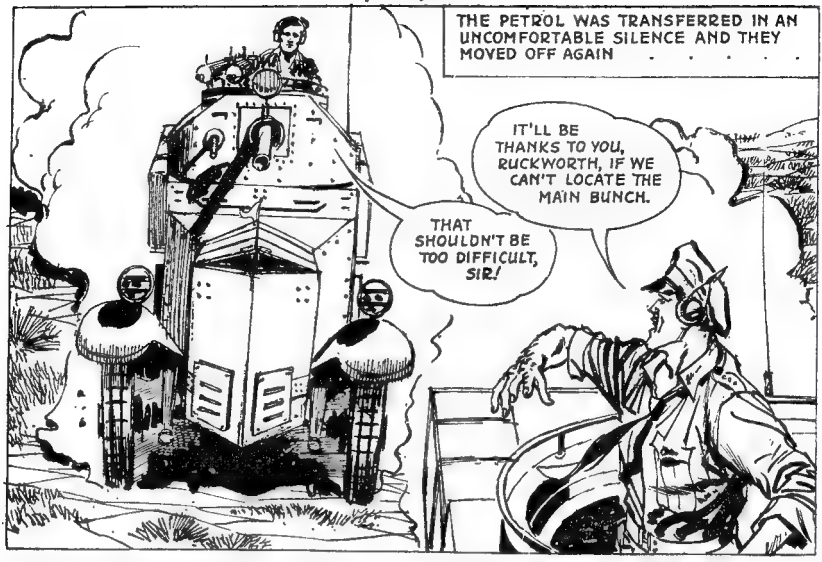


A TOUGH AND RESOURCEFUL LEADER, CAPTAIN WAYNE'S DEVIL-MAY-CARE ATTITUDE TOOK LITTLE ACCOUNT OF THE ODDS . . .

THE ENEMY WERE CAUGHT BETWEEN A POWERFUL CROSSFIRE . . .



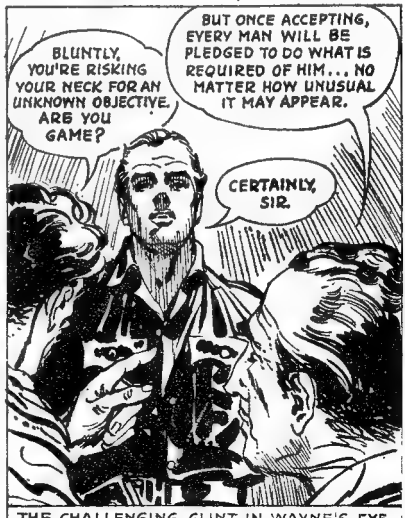
IN A FEW TEMPESTUOUS MINUTES, THE BATTLE WAS OVER AND THE ENEMY HAD FLED. DAVE RUCKWORTH FACED HIS COLOURFUL AND RAKISHLY DRESSED SENIOR.
SEEMS LIKE I HAVE TO RESCUE A HALF-WIT WHO FORGOT TO REFUEL THIS MORNING, RUCKWORTH!
NOT ENTIRELY, SIR. WHEN OUR TURN CAME, THE BOWSER WAS DRY.
THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE LOOKED ELSEWHERE, RUCKWORTH!
YOU GAVE US NO TIME TO, SIR!
WAYNE'S FACE, FLUSHED WITH IMPETUOUS ANGER, CONTRASTED SHARPLY WITH RUCKWORTH'S COOL, STEADY LOOK.


THE PETROL WAS TRANSFERRED IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCE AND THEY MOVED OFF AGAIN . . . . . .
IT'LL BE THANKS TO YOU, RUCKWORTH, IF WE CAN'T LOCATE THE MAIN BUNCH.
THAT SHOULDN'T BE TOO DIFFICULT, SIR!

FIVE DUST-RIDDEN HOURS LATER, THEY ARRIVED 130 MILES DEEP IN THE DESERT TO FIND A MOTLEY ASSEMBLY OF MEN AND VEHICLES . . . THE CUT-OFF REMNANT OF A DEFEATED ARMY.
WHAT'S OUR CHANCE OF REJOINING THE MAIN GROUP, I WONDER?
IT WOULD BE EASIER IF WE KNEW WHERE THEY WERE.
I'LL FIND COLONEL COLLIER. PERHAPS HE'LL HAVE SOME INSTRUCTIONS FOR US.

SOON AFTERWARDS, DAVE WAS CALLED TO COLONEL COLLIER'S TENT. THERE HE FOUND CAPTAIN WAYNE AS WELL . . .

IN TIRED-BUT STEADY TONES, THE COLONEL WENT ON . . .



THE CHALLENGING GLINT IN WAYNE'S EYE WAS ENOUGH FOR DAVE RUCKWORTH. . .

OUTSIDE, THE LIEUTENANT HAD TO SATISFY HIMSELF ON ONE POINT . . . .
DID YOU SUGGEST ME FOR THIS JOB?
I DID, RUCKWORTH. BUT GET THIS STRAIGHT . . . IT'S THE JOB THAT NEEDS YOU, NOT ME!
EVEN WAYNE COULD PUT DUTY BEFORE PERSONAL FEELINGS . . . AND HE KNEW THAT THIS TOUGH LIEUTENANT WAS THE MAN FOR THE UNUSUAL TASK AHEAD . . .

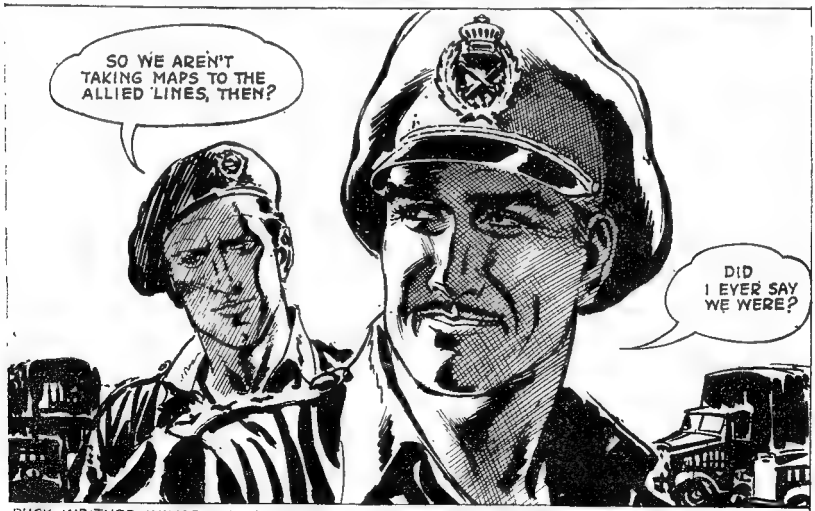
NEXT MORNING, DAVE JOINED WAYNE'S PARTY. THEY WERE TO TAKE TWELVE TRUCKS SCREENED BY TWO ARMOURED CARS . . . HIS OWN AND WAYNE'S. HE CAUGHT SIGHT OF SOME FLAT WOOD CASES BEING STOWED ABOARD . . . .
MAP CHESTS, EH? MAYBE WE'RE GOING TO SMUGGLE THEM BACK TO THE ALLIED LINES . . . WHEREVER THAT IS!
LUMME, THEY'RE A WEIGHT.
PAPER ALWAYS IS, MATE.

AT NOON, WHEN THE PARTY FELL IN, DAVE WAS SURPRISED TO FIND THAT THERE WERE ONLY TWENTY MEN APART FROM THE DRIVERS.

WAYNE'S ARMOURED CAR LED THEM OFF IN A NORTH-EASTERLY DIRECTION WHICH SEEMED TO SUGGEST TOWARDS THE ALLIED LINES NEAR EGYPT, THREE HUNDRED MILES AWAY. REACHING BUMPY GROUND AFTER A TIME, DAVE RUCKWORTH'S EYE WAS DRAWN TO THE REARMOST TRUCK . . .

BUT ALREADY IT WAS TOO LATE. THE CASE CRASHED TO THE GROUND AND THE ARMOURED CAR BRAKED QUITE CLOSE TO IT. WALKING BACK, SOMETHING PECULIAR ABOUT THIS CASE MADE DAVE QUICKEN HIS STEP...

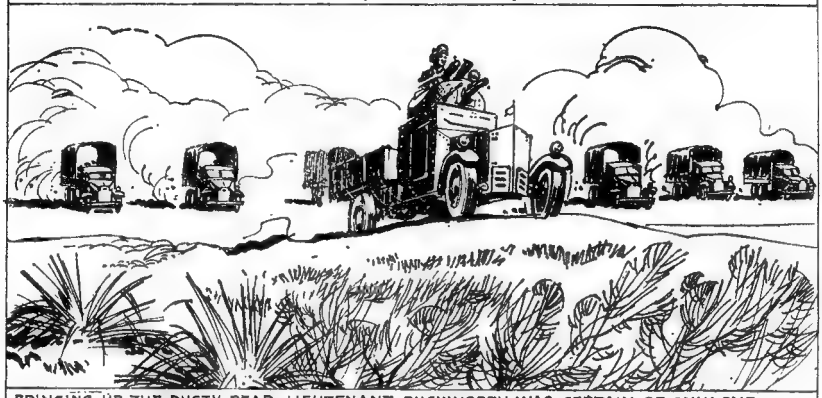
THE CASE HAD SPLINTERED APART AND THE LIEUTENANT KICKED IT WIDE OPEN . . .



RUCK WRITHED INWARDLY AT THE CONTEMPTUOUS GRIN OF WAYNE. HOW THE MAN LOVED TO SCORE OFF PEOPLE!

Chapter 3. BREAKING POINT

AT DAWN, THE PARTY SET OFF AGAIN. NOW WAYNE HAD THEM SPREAD OUT IN A LONG LINE ABREAST. NO REASON WAS GIVEN AND NO SENSE COULD BE MADE OF IT . . .



BRINGING UP THE DUSTY REAR, LIEUTENANT RUCKWORTH WAS CERTAIN OF ONLY ONE THING . . . THEIR DIRECTION, WHICH WAS NOW NORTHERLY.

BUT LATER, WHEN WAYNE SIGNALLED FOR EVEN MORE SPEED, DAVE ORDERED HIS CAR TO CATCH UP WITH THEIR LEADER . . .

EVENTUALLY, WAYNE CALLED A SHORT HALT CLOSE TO A ROCKY OUTCROP AND LEFT THEM TO INSPECT THE LAND TO THE EAST. DAVE FOLLOWED THAT SELF-IMPORTANT FIGURE WITH A JAUNDICED EYE.
ALL THIS IS JUST WAYNE'S CUP OF TEA . . . BAGS OF SECRECY! . . . CHARGING ABOUT . . . DEATH OR GLORY . . .

CAMP THAT NIGHT BROUGHT FURTHER INDIGNATION FROM THE MEN. DAVE APPROACHED WAYNE TO SPEAK FOR THEM
THE MEN ARE COMPLAINING, SIR . . . WITH GOOD REASON, I FEEL. YOU'VE GOT THESE FIRES MUCH TOO BRIGHT. WE'LL BE SEEN MILES OFF!
THEN POST MORE SENTRIES, MISTER RUCKWORTH!

IN THE LEAPING FLAME-LIGHT, DAVE RUCKWORTH ONCE AGAIN CAUGHT THAT MOCKING GRIN.

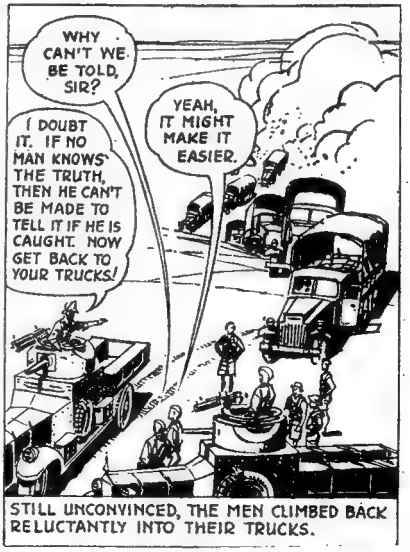
NEXT DAY, EVEN THOSE WHO HAD JOKED PESSIMISTICALLY WERE SILENCED. THEY NOT ONLY HAD TO DRIVE FAST BUT WAYNE HAD ALSO ORDERED THEM TO ZIG-ZAG IN THE CRAZIEST MANNER . . .

BUT EVEN WORSE WAS TO FOLLOW. APPROACHING A RANGE OF SANDSTONE HILLS, WAYNE LED THEM IN SINGLE FILE . . . ***STARKLY ALONG THE SKYLINE!*** RUCKWORTH COULD BARELY BELIEVE HIS EYES!

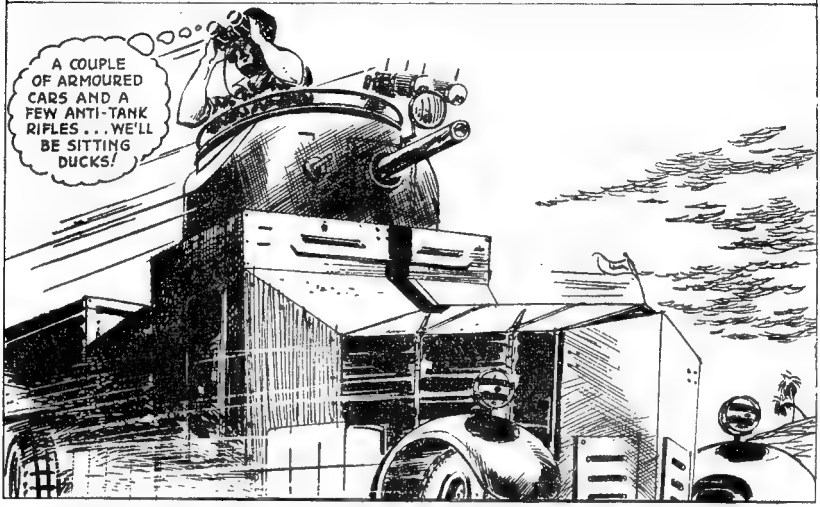
RACING PAST THE CHURNING TRUCKS WITH THEIR GRIM-FACED OCCUPANTS, DAVE MADE WAYNE PULL UP.

SOME OF THE MEN HAD JUMPED FROM THEIR TRUCKS, MUTTERING REBELLIOUSLY. WITH A THEATRICAL FLOURISH, WAYNE ADDRESSED THEM. HE EVEN APPEARED TO BE ENJOYING HIS SULLEN AUDIENCE.
YOU CAME OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL . . . YOU KNEW THE CONDITIONS? YOU KNEW YOU WOULD HAVE TO BE KEPT IN IGNORANCE . . . AND THAT YOU WOULD HAVE TO OBEY WITHOUT QUESTION. RIGHT?

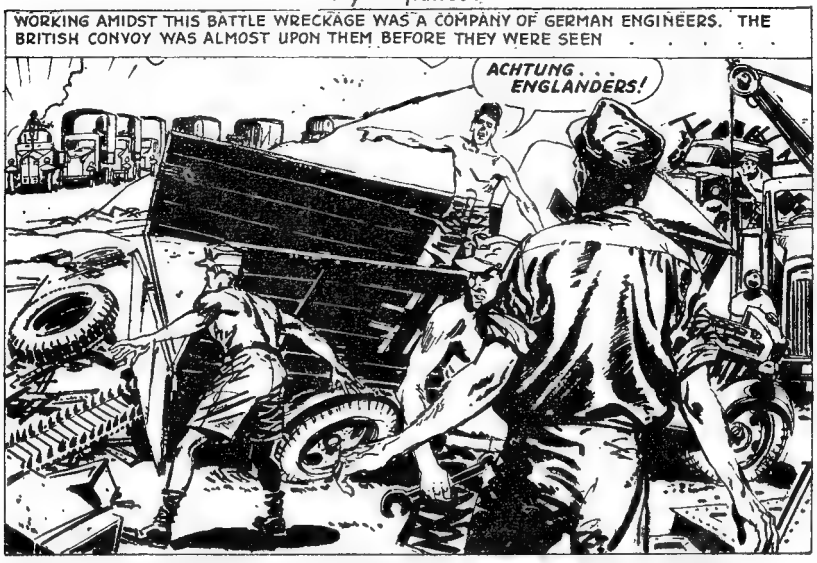
RUCK FELT HE SHOULD SUPPORT THESE UNHAPPY MEN.
WE EXPECTED RISKS, YES. BUT WE DIDN'T EXPECT TO HAVE OUR NECKS PUT ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK FOR NO GOOD REASON.

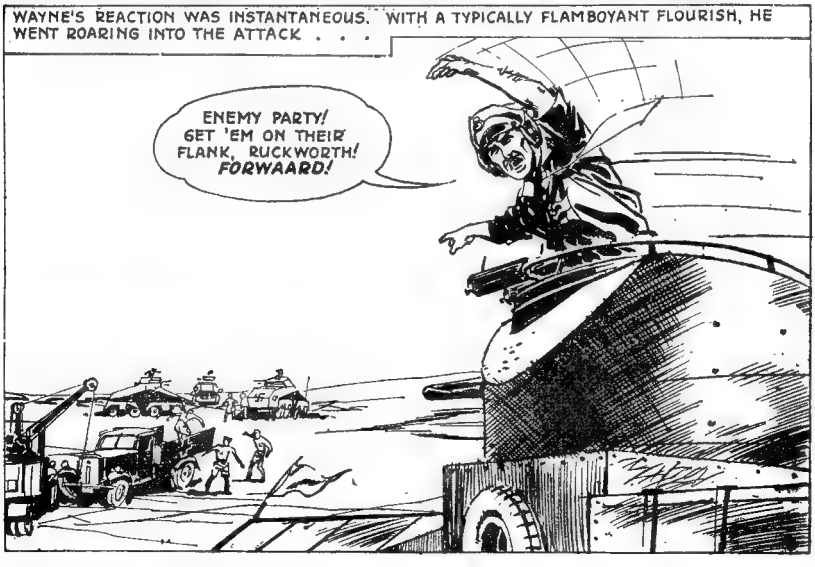

WHY CAN'T WE BE TOLD, SIR?
I DOUBT IT. IF NO MAN KNOWS THE TRUTH, THEN HE CAN'T BE MADE TO TELL IT IF HE IS CAUGHT. NOW GET BACK TO YOUR TRUCKS!
YEAH, IT MIGHT MAKE IT EASIER.
STILL UNCONVINCED, THE MEN CLIMBED BACK RELUCTANTLY INTO THEIR TRUCKS.

WHEN THE COLUMN MOVED ON, DAVE KEPT SCANNING THE DESERT UNEASILY, CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR LIMITED MEANS AGAINST AN ATTACK THAT SEEMED INEVITABLE.



PRESENTLY THEY ENTERED A VALLEY WHERE SOMBRE SIGNS OF A BYGONE BATTLE LAY ALL AROUND


WORKING AMIDST THIS BATTLE WRECKAGE WAS A COMPANY OF GERMAN ENGINEERS. THE BRITISH CONVOY WAS ALMOST UPON THEM BEFORE THEY WERE SEEN . . . . . .
ACHTUNG . . . ENGLANDERS!


WAYNE'S REACTION WAS INSTANTANEOUS. WITH A TYPICALLY FLAMBOYANT FLOURISH, HE WENT ROARING INTO THE ATTACK . . .
ENEMY PARTY! GET 'EM ON THEIR FLANK, RUCKWORTH! FORWAARD!

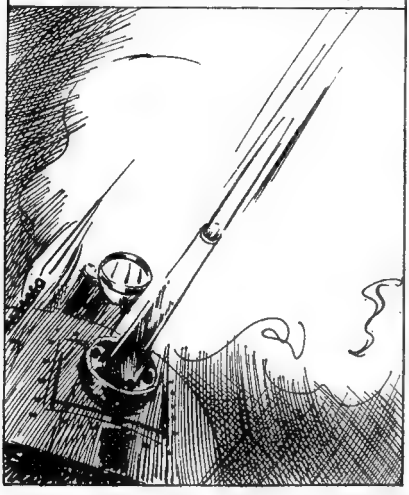
TOO LATE, THE IMPETUOUS BRITISH CAPTAIN SAW THE GERMAN ESCORT . . . THREE HEAVY ARMOURED CARS. BUT HE WAS ALREADY COMMITTED . . . .
OUTNUMBERED, BY HARRY!

RACING PAST THEIR OWN TRUCKS AT TOP SPEED, DAVE SHOUTED FOR SUPPORTING ACTION . . . .
TAKE COVER . . . AND GIVE US COVERING FIRE!

FLINGING THEMSELVES FLAT, THE BRITISH PARTY OPENED FIRE ON THE GERMAN ENGINEERS WHILE THE ARMOURED CARS FOUGHT IT OUT. .

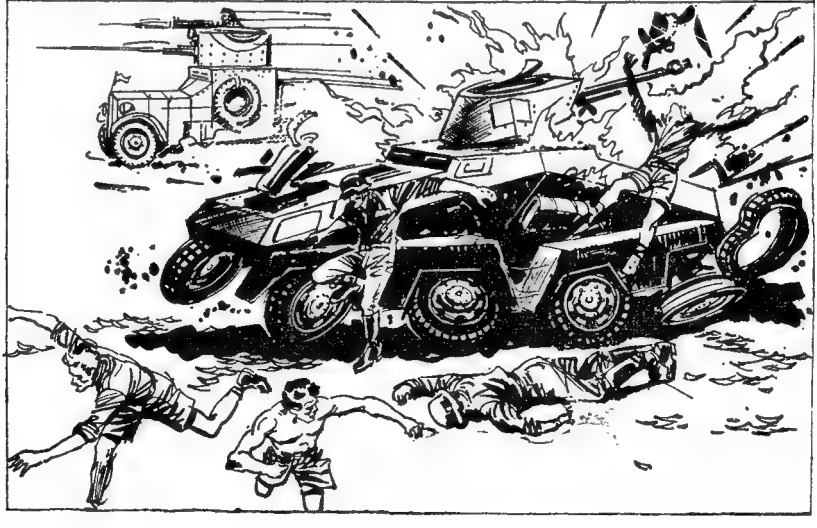
AS WAYNE WAS ATTACKED BY TWO OF THE ENEMY ARMOURED CARS, RUCKWORTH SWEPT IN ON THE FLANK AND TOOK THE THIRD BY SURPRISE.

THE ENEMY VEHICLE LOST DIRECTION AS ITS COMMANDER WAS HIT AND DAVE TURNED HIS GUNS ON ONE OF WAYNE'S ATTACKERS.



HIS SHOTS PUNCHED INTO THE SECOND ENEMY CAR WITH DEVASTATING EFFECT . . .

THE FUEL TANK CAUGHT FIRE AND THE GERMAN CAR'S CREW LEAPED FOR THEIR LIVES . . .

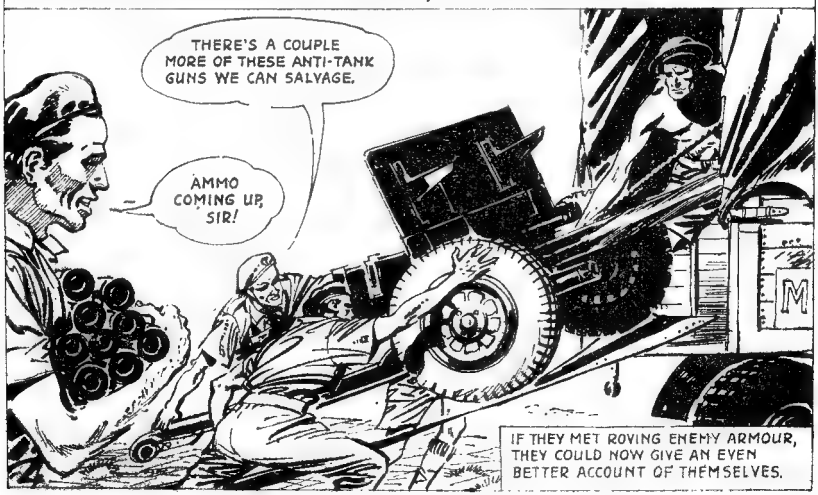


THE CONCENTRATED FIRE OF THE TWO BRITISH ARMOURED VEHICLES WAS TURNED ON THE SURVIVING GERMAN . . . AND THE SKIRMISH WAS AS GOOD AS OVER.

THEIR ARMOURED BODYGUARD VANQUISHED, THE GERMAN WORKING PARTY OF ENGINEERS SCATTERED . . .

IT WAS NOT UNTIL THEN THAT DAVE HEARD THAT CAPTAIN WAYNE WAS WOUNDED. HE FOUND THE UNCONSCIOUS OFFICER SUPPORTED BY A CORPORAL MEDICAL ORDERLY . . .

WITH WAYNE LAID LOW, THE FULL IMPLICATION OF THE ASSUMED COMMAND DID NOT AT FIRST STRIKE LIEUTENANT RUCKWORTH. HIS ONLY THOUGHT WAS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR MEAGRE ARMS . . . AND AMIDST THE RECENT BATTLEFIELD, HE SAW HIS CHANCES . . .



THAT EVENING, A FEELING OF UNEASINESS PERVADED THE CAMP. RUCK FELT IT, TOO, FOR HE HAD COME TO REALISE THE STRANGENESS OF HIS POSITION.

THEN, DURING THE NIGHT, RUCK WAS CALLED TO THE TRUCK WHERE THEY HAD LAID THE WOUNDED CAPTAIN. HIS EYES WERE BURNING WITH PAIN BUT A JEALOUS GUARD OF HIS POSITION GAVE HIM A FEVERISH STRENGTH. HIS WORDS CAME JERKILY . .

FALTERINGLY, WAYNE OUTLINED THE DARING PLAN DESIGNED TO COVER THE BRITISH WITHDRAWAL INTO EGYPT.

AT LAST, DAVE UNDERSTOOD WAYNE'S CRAZY ACTIONS . . . THE DUST-MAKING, THE BRIGHT CAMP FIRES, THE SKYLINE TRAIL.

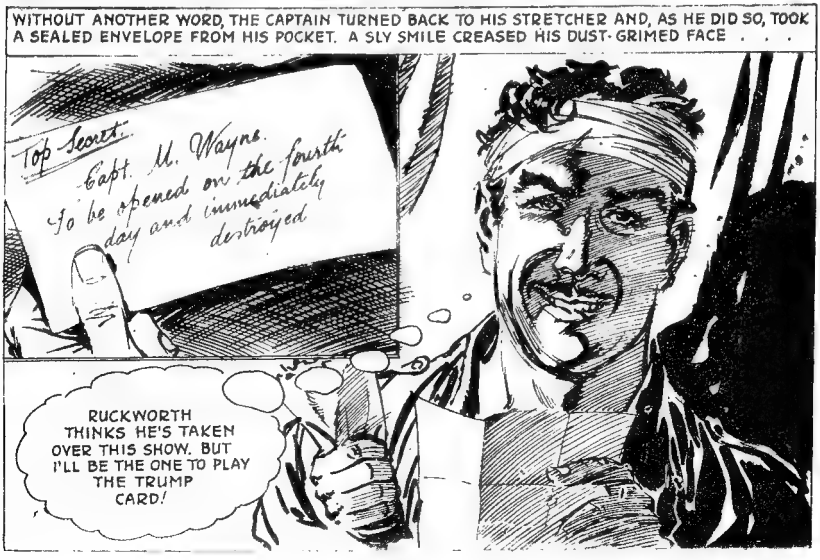
THE CAPTAIN WAS LAPSING INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS AGAIN BUT DAVE MANAGED TO GET A LAST CRUMB OF INFORMATION . . .
WHEN DID THE MAIN PARTY PLAN TO MOVE OFF?
THIS MORNING... AND HEAVEN HELP ME... I... I HAVEN'T DRAWN THE ENEMY YET!
WAYNE ROUSED HIMSELF AGAIN FOR ONE FINAL AND FIERCE INJUNCTION . . .
REMEMBER, RUCKWORTH... NOT A MAN MUST KNOW ABOUT THIS... ABSOLUTE SILENCE, UNDERSTAND?
THE MEDICAL CORPORAL ARRIVED TO DRESS WAYNE'S HEAD AND RUCKWORTH STEPPED OUTSIDE. AN ENTIRELY NEW SITUATION FACED HIM . . .
SO FAR I'VE STUCK BY THE MEN BUT NOW I'M ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE ... AND IT ISN'T GOING TO BE EASY.

Chapter 2. SECRET MISSION

AFTER A RESTLESS NIGHT, THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT HAD THE MEN ROUSED JUST BEFORE DAWN. HE TOLD THEM OF CAPTAIN WAYNE'S CONDITION . . .

THE MEN HESITATED MUTINOUSLY . . . THEN SLOWLY MOVED OFF.

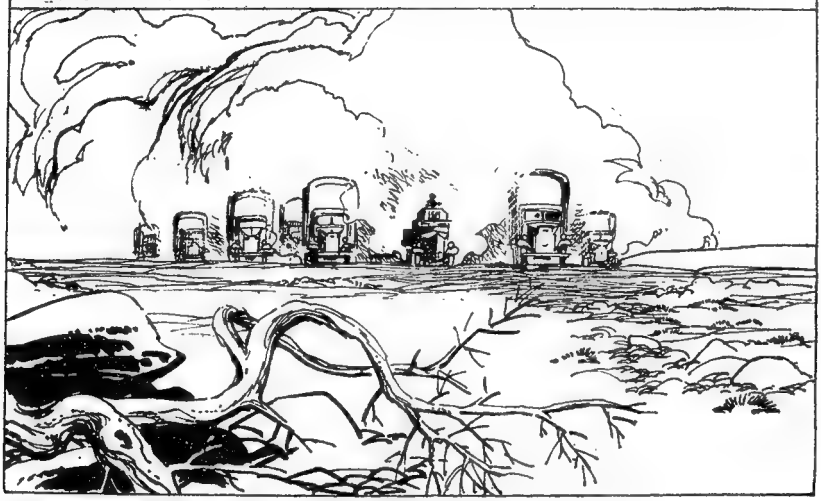
IN ANOTHER HOUR THEY WERE READY TO MOVE. DAVE WAS STARTLED TO FIND THAT CAPTAIN WAYNE HAD DRAGGED HIMSELF TO HIS FEET.
LISTEN, RUCKWORTH . . . THE MOMENT YOU SIGHT THE ENEMY, I MUST BE TOLD. UNDERSTOOD?
YESSIR!


WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, THE CAPTAIN TURNED BACK TO HIS STRETCHER AND, AS HE DID SO, TOOK A SEALED ENVELOPE FROM HIS POCKET. A SLY SMILE CREASED HIS DUST-GRIMED FACE . . .
Top Secret
Capt. M. Wayne.
To be opened on the fourth day and immediately destroyed
RUCKWORTH THINKS HE'S TAKEN OVER THIS SHOW. BUT I'LL BE THE ONE TO PLAY THE TRUMP CARD!

DAVE'S FIRST ORDERS SENT THE MEN SCOUTING FOR LENGTHS OF BROKEN TANK TRACKS WHICH HE LASHED TO TOWROPES, WATCHED BY HIS SULLEN MEN.

MUTTERING REBELLIOUSLY, THE MEN CLIMBED INTO THEIR TRUCKS WHICH MOVED OFF IN A RISING CLOUD OF DUST.

DAVE FELT SORRY FOR THE MEN BUT ONE LOOK AT THE RESULTANT DUST-TRAILS, RISING STRAIGHT TO THE SKY GAVE HIM GRIM SATISFACTION. SURELY THEY WOULD BE SEEN BY THE ENEMY . . .



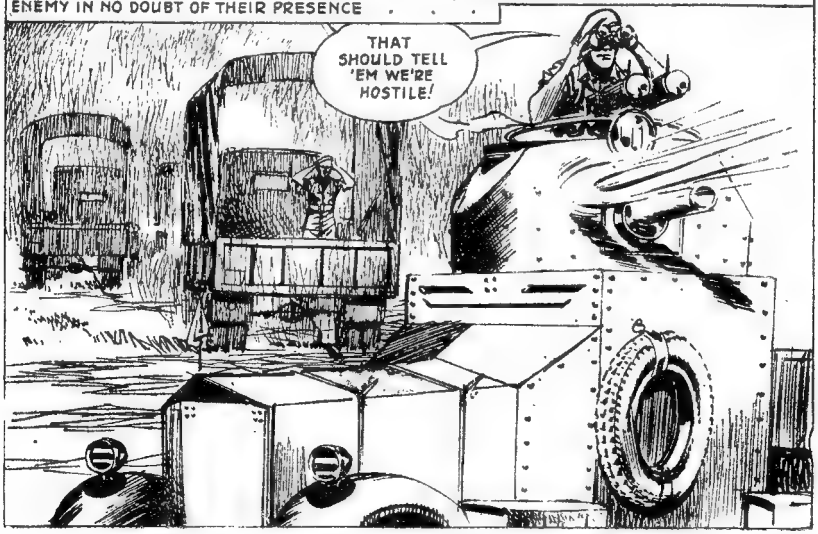
THEN AT NOON, CAME THE CRY OF ALARM THAT DAVE HAD BEEN AWAITING . . .

IN A FLASH, THE OFFICER CLAMBERED UP BESIDE THE LOOK-OUT, IGNORING THE STARTLED AND INDIGNANT COMMENTS OF HIS MEN . . .
JERRIES, ALL RIGHT!
I AIN'T SURPRISED!
NOW WE'RE FOR IT!

THEN THE FULL WEIGHT OF THE SITUATION SWEPT UPON DAVE. TO DRAW THE ENEMY WAS ONE THING . . . TO AVOID A DISASTROUS ACTION WHEN HE IS DRAWN IS ANOTHER.
THERE'S ONLY ONE THING WE CAN DO. . . THAT'S TO HIP BACK INTO ALL THAT DUST WE'VE JUST MADE.

AT HIS ORDER, THE MEN RACED FOR THEIR VEHICLES. IT WAS THE FIRST SENSIBLE ORDER THEY HAD HEARD IN DAYS.

CLIMBING INTO THE TURRET OF HIS ARMOURED CAR, DAVE STAYED BEHIND TO LEAVE THE ENEMY IN NO DOUBT OF THEIR PRESENCE . . . .



HE NEED NOT HAVE WORRIED. THE GERMANS WERE SATISFIED THAT THEY HAD FOUND THEIR QUARRY. . . .
ALL THAT DUST! IT MUST BE THE BRITISH TRYING TO ESCAPE US!

FOR OBERST HERMANN MULLER, COLD-HUMOURED COMMANDER OF THE PANZER-GRUPPE, THIS SEEMED THE MOMENT FOR WHICH HE HAD BEEN WAITING WITH ALL THE TIRELESS PATIENCE OF A BIRD OF PREY.
AT LAST... THE BRITISH VERMIN SCUTTLE FOR THEIR HOLES BUT THIS TIME WE HAVE THEM! THEY CANNOT ESCAPE US!

ALREADY BRIMMING WITH CONFIDENCE FROM ROMMEL'S LATEST OFFENSIVE, THE PANZER GUNNERS WERE ITCHING FOR FURTHER CONQUESTS.

WITH THEIR TRUE NUMBERS STILL OBSCURED FROM ENEMY EYES, DAVID RUCKWORTH LED HIS MEN FARTHER BACK INTO THEIR OLD DUST-CLOUDS. YET HE KNEW THEY COULD NOT KEEP UP THIS DECEPTION FOR LONG . . . .

INEVITABLY, THEY WOULD BE DRIVEN INTO THE OPEN . . . IF ONLY HE COULD CHOOSE THE PLACE, THEY MIGHT STAND A SLIM CHANCE.

IT WAS NOT EASY IN ALL THAT DUST TO FIND THE VALLEY HE HAD REMEMBERED. WHEN HE DID, HE CALLED A HALT AND ADDRESSED THE MEN . . .

WORKING FEVERISHLY, THEY MAN-HANDLED THE GUNS UP THE ROCKY SLOPE INTO THE COVER OF BOULDERS.
RIGHT, BACK TO THE TRUCKS FOR THE AMMO...

THEN DAVE SPOKE TO THE RIFLEMEN, WELL AWARE OF THEIR TENSE, ACCUSING LOOKS. IT WAS AS IF THEY SAW IN THIS LAST ACT OF MADNESS THEIR FINAL DESTRUCTION.
THIS IS WHERE WE STAND... COME WHAT MAY! YOU MUST BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL YOU THAT WE ARE FIGHTING FOR MORE THAN OUR LIVES. WE MUST HOLD THE ENEMY OFF TO THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT.

THE MEN DISPERSED TO THEIR BATTLE POSITIONS AND DAVID TURNED TO THE TRUCK DRIVERS . . .
YOU FELLOWS WILL START UP AGAIN AND CONTINUE TO DRIVE ON UP THIS VALLEY. MAKE ALL THE DUST YOU CAN... JUST AS BEFORE ...THAT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT.

AS THE MEN WALKED IN BEWILDERMENT TO THEIR TRUCKS, DAVE HEARD HIS NAME CALLED. IT WAS CAPTAIN WAYNE . . .
WHAT'S GOING ON, RUCKWORTH? I SAID YOU WERE TO TELL ME WHEN THE ENEMY WAS SIGHTED!
SORRY, SIR... BUT THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO.

DESPITE WAYNE'S FURIOUS PROTESTS, THE YOUNG OFFICER HAD HIS SENIOR CARRIED OFF WITH THE OTHER TRUCKS.
STOP! IT'S IMPORTANT! STOP, I TELL YOU!
I CAN'T CHANCE A SICK MAN TRYING TO RUN THIS SHOW.

FINALLY, THE SET-FACED LIEUTENANT PLACED THEIR ARMOURED CARS, ONE ON EITHER SIDE OF THE VALLEY'S ENTRANCE. HE ENTRUSTED HIS OWN TO THE CHEERY CROSBIE, HIS GUNNER.
A LOT DEPENDS ON YOU, CROSBIE.
YOU CAN RELY ON ME, SIR!

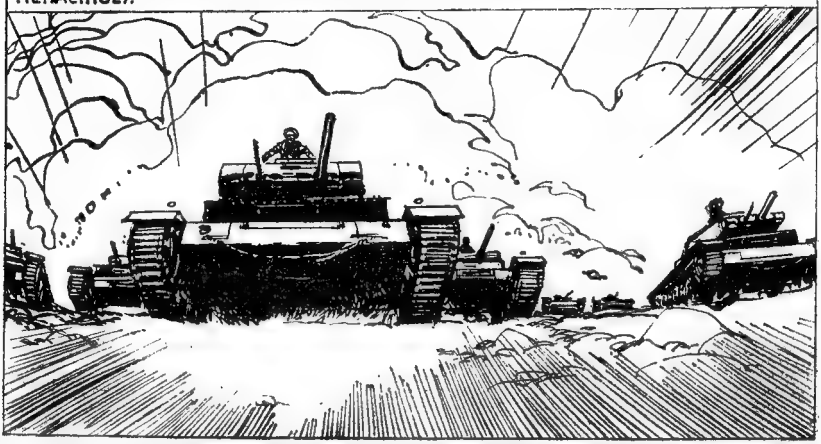
JUST THEN A SARDONIC VOICE REACHED THE OFFICER'S EARS . . .
BUZZARD BAIT... THAT'S WHAT WE ARE, MATES... BUZZARD BAIT!
POOR DEVILS! THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN TOLD OUR MISSION RIGHT AT THE START.

Chapter 4. DUMMY REARGUARD

GRIMLY SATISFIED THAT HE COULD DO NO MORE TO HIS MEAGRE DEFENCES, LIEUTENANT RUCKWORTH GAVE A FINAL LOOK ROUND AND THEN STATIONED HIMSELF WITH A CENTRAL ANTI-TANK GUN.

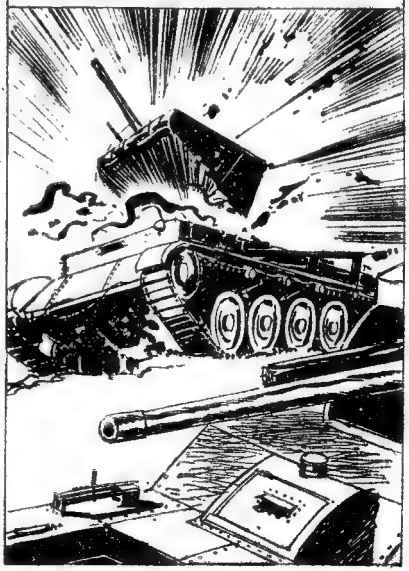
THE WAITING IN THAT SWELTERING SILENCE BROUGHT EVERY MAN'S NERVES CLOSE TO SNAPPING POINT. PRESENTLY, THE CLANK AND RUMBLE OF ENEMY ARMOUR REACHED THEIR EARS. THE MOMENT OF ACTION WAS AT HAND . . .

OUT OF THE NOONDAY DUST THE PANZERS ROARED, GUN-MUZZLES QUESTING AHEAD MENACINGLY.



COOLLY, DAVID RUCKWORTH WAITED, CAREFULLY TAKING AIM. THEN . . .

THE GUN-CRACK SPLIT THE DESERT AIR AND THE SHELL PUNCHED HOME WITH DEVASTATING ACCURACY.



THE STRICKEN TANK SLEWED WILDLY SIDEWAYS AND THERE WAS A SCREECH OF COLLIDING STEEL . . .
LOOK OUT!
HIMMEL!
OBSERVING ALL THIS WITH A STARTLED GRUNT, OBERST MULLER SLAMMED SHUT HIS OWN HATCH COVER AND STUDIED THE GROUND AHEAD THROUGH THE OBSERVATION SLIT.
SO! A REARGUARD ACTION . . . WHILE THE REST RUN FOR THEIR MISERABLE LIVES!
HIS TEUTON MIND SNEERED AT THE TYPICALLY BRITISH . . . AND PUTILE . . . ACTION.

A SECOND'S QUICK THINKING AND MULLER WAS SNAPPING ORDERS . . . .
ACHTUNG KRAFTWAGENKOMMANDO . . .
AND THERE FOLLOWED SHARP COMMANDS TO HIS ARMOURED CAR DETACHMENT.

NEXT MULLER GAVE HIS ATTENTION TO THE DEFENCE POSITIONS AHEAD.
STILL A THOUSAND YARDS TO GO BEFORE WE CAN CRUSH THESE ACCURSED ENGLANDERS UNDER OUR TRACKS!

AGAIN THE ANTI-TANK GUNS BARKED AND TWO MORE GERMAN TANKS GROUND TO A STANDSTILL, EACH WITH A TWO-POUNDER SHELL SNUFFING OUT ALL LIFE WITHIN ITS STEEL HULL.

IT WAS COOL, CALCULATING SHOOTING AT ITS MOST DESTRUCTIVE.

AGAIN MULLER ROARED AN ORDER AND THE SURVIVING TANKS BACKED AWAY INTO COVER. IT WAS AN UNEXPECTED REVERSE FOR THE GERMAN FORCE.

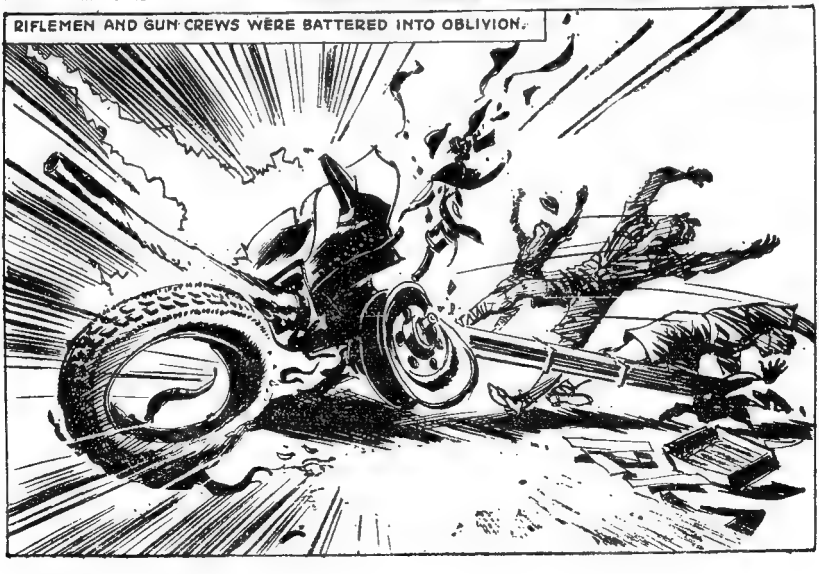
GO FORWARD AND GET ME THE STRENGTH OF THESE ENGLANDERS!

JAWOHL, HERR OBERST!

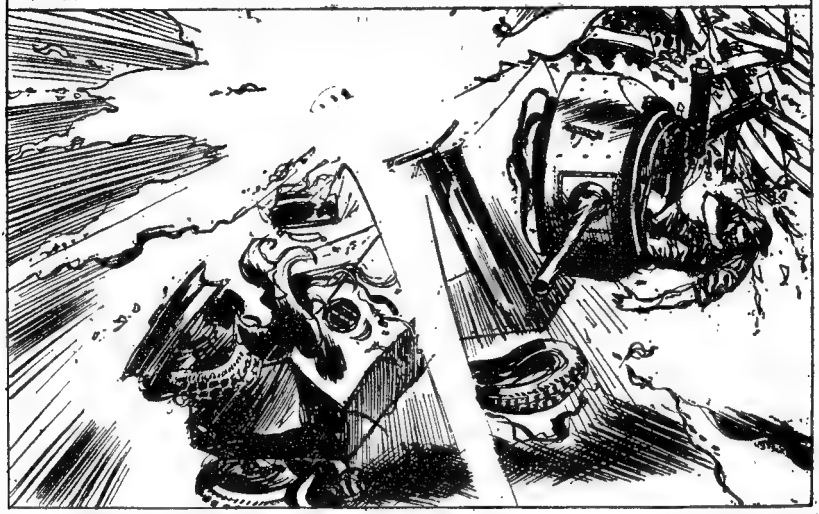
THE SUDDEN SILENCE BROUGHT A CHEER FROM DAVID RUCKWORTH'S MEN . . . BUT HE HIMSELF KNEW THAT THE BATTLE HAD SCARCELY STARTED . . . .

ENCOURAGED THOUGH HE WAS BY HIS SCOUTS' REPORT ON THE SLIMNESS OF THE BRITISH DEFENCES, MULLER SETTLED DOWN TO A STATIC GUN DUEL. A MURDEROUS CONCENTRATION OF FIRE WAS FLUNG AT THE SIDES OF THE VALLEY.

METHODICALLY AND WITH RUTHLESS PRECISION, THE GERMAN GUNS BLASTED THE BRITISH POSITIONS ONE BY ONE.


RIFLEMEN AND GUN CREWS WERE BATTERED INTO OBLIVION.

THE BRITISH ARMOURED CARS WERE VULNERABLE ADVERSARIES TO THE HEAVIER GERMAN METAL.



CHILLED BY THE CRIES OF THE WOUNDED, DAVE RUCKWORTH LABOURED TO KEEP HIS OWN GUN FIRING . . .

GALLANT FIRE FROM CROSBIE'S GUNS BROUGHT A SAVAGE RETALIATION AND THE ARMOURED CAR WAS PLUNGED INTO FLAMES FROM A DIRECT HIT.

SHELLS WERE RAINING ON THE BRITISH POSITION, LACING THE DESERT AIR WITH WHITE-HOT PIECES OF SHRAPNEL. THE YOUNG OFFICER WAS ONE OF THOSE HIT . . .

HE REELED DIZZILY, TEETH CLENCHED ON THE AGONISING PAIN, THE END COULD NOT BE FAR AWAY . . .

DEATH OR SURRENDER! THE DECISION WAS STARKLY URGENT. FROM BEHIND HIM THERE CAME A RUMBLE OF MOTORS . . .
OH, NO!
THE TRUCKS! THEY'RE COMING BACK!
WITH A SINKING HEART, DAVE RUCKWORTH CAUGHT SIGHT OF THEIR ESCORT . . . GERMAN ARMOURED CARS.

MENACED BY THE GUNS OF THE ENEMY ARMOUR BEHIND HIS POSITION, THE WEARY LIEUTENANT HAD NO OPTION BUT TO GIVE UP THE UNEQUAL FIGHT. HE WAVED HIS MEN DOWN . . . . . .

IT WAS LITTLE CONSOLATION TO THE WOUNDED LIEUTENANT TO KNOW THAT THEY HAD FOUGHT AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS . . . THAT THEY COULD HAVE DONE NO MORE . . .

HIS MEN CAME LIMPING TOWARDS HIM, SOME HURLING AWAY THEIR WEAPONS IN IMPOTENT DISGUST. HE WAS SHOCKED TO SEE SO FEW LEFT. HIS CAPTORS COULD SCARCELY BELIEVE THE WEAKNESS IN NUMBERS OF THEIR STUBBORN OPPONENTS.

THE BATTLE-GRIMED MEN WERE LINED UP TOGETHER WITH THE DRIVERS . . . TO AWAIT OBERSTLEUTNANT HERMANN MULLER.
ACHTUNG! HERE COMES THE COMMANDER.

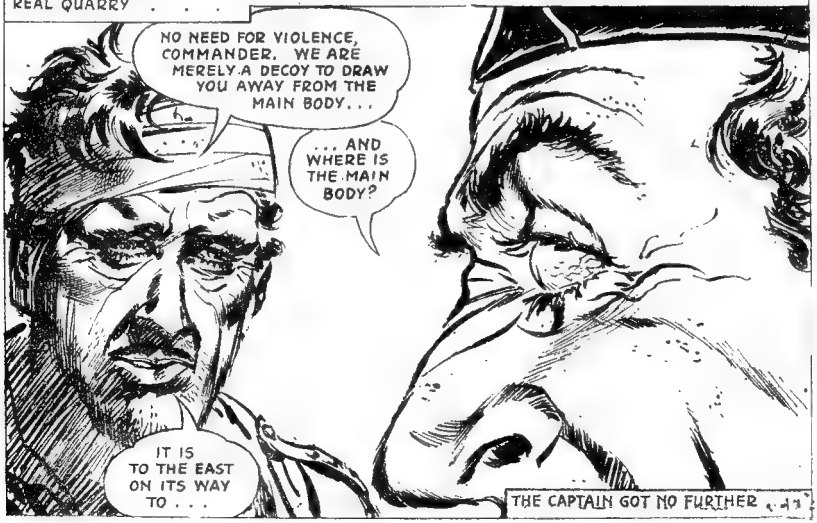
MULLER RAGED UP TO THE GROUP OF PRISONERS, HIS FACE WHITE WITH ANGER . . .
SO! I HAVE BEEN TRICKED! WHAT IS THIS MISERABLE FORCE WE HAVE BEEN HUNTING?

THE GERMAN SNATCHED AT DAVE'S WOUNDED ARM. HIS VOICE ROSE TO A FURIOUS SNARL AS HE TWISTED IT BRUTALLY BEHIND THE ENGLISHMAN'S BACK . . .
WHAT IS THIS JOKE? WHERE IS YOUR MAIN ARMY? ANSWER, DOG!... ANSWER!

RUCKWORTH'S SENSES REELED AND HE SANK IMPOTENTLY TO HIS KNEES BENEATH THAT VICIOUS ATTACK. SUDDENLY, NEW ARRIVALS CAUGHT MULLER'S EYE . . .
ACH! WHO HAVE YOU THERE?
AN ENGLANDER CAPTAIN, HERR OBERSTLEUTNANT.
SO! SKULKING AWAY LIKE A MISERABLE COWARD, WAS HE?

MULLER THRUST RUCKWORTH TO ONE SIDE AND GLARED INTO THE PALE FACE OF THE WOUNDED CAPTAIN WAYNE.

THEN TO DAVE'S HORROR, CAPTAIN WAYNE BEGAN TO BLAB OUT THE LOCATION OF THE GERMAN'S REAL QUARRY . . .



FOR WITH THE LAST OUNCE OF HIS WANING STRENGTH, THE OUTRAGED RUCKWORTH LEAPED FORWARD, A CRY OF FURY BURSTING FROM HIS LIPS . . .
WHY, YOU TREACHEROUS RAT!
STOP HIM!
A GERMAN PISTOL BUTT SLAMMED DOWN . . .
UGH!

SUDDENLY MULLER WAS ALL IMPATIENCE TO BE GONE.
GET THE PRISONERS INTO THEIR OWN TRUCKS. SCHNELL!

WHILE THIS WAS DONE, THE GERMAN COMMANDER LASHED HIS MEN WITH THE FURY OF MORTIFICATION . . .
THE ENGLANDERS HAVE MADE FOOLS OF US... AND THEY SHALL PAY DEARLY FOR THAT! THE MAIN ENEMY FORCE LIES OVER TO THE EAST MAKING FOR SAFETY...
...BUT HE IS NOT SAFE YET. WE SHALL PURSUE HIM... AND DESTROY HIM UTTERLY!
WITH A FIERCE SWEEP OF HIS ARM, OBERSTLEUTNANT MULLER SENT THE MEN SPRINTING TO THEIR TANKS.. THE CHASE WAS ON.

Chapter 5. DESERT DEATH-KNELL

THE GERMAN TANKS KEPT UP THE ROARING PURSUIT FOR HOUR AFTER GRUELLING HOUR. MANY MILES OF THE ENDLESS DESERT WASTE HAD TO BE COVERED BEFORE THEY COULD HOPE TO MAKE GOOD THE TIME SO GRIMLY BOUGHT BY THE SMALL BRITISH FORCE.

AT THE REAR, IN ONE OF THE ROCKING TRUCKS, LIEUTENANT RUCKWORTH CAME OUT OF A COMA OF PAIN, TO FIND HIMSELF THE CENTRE OF SYMPATHETIC IF RUEFUL GRINS.

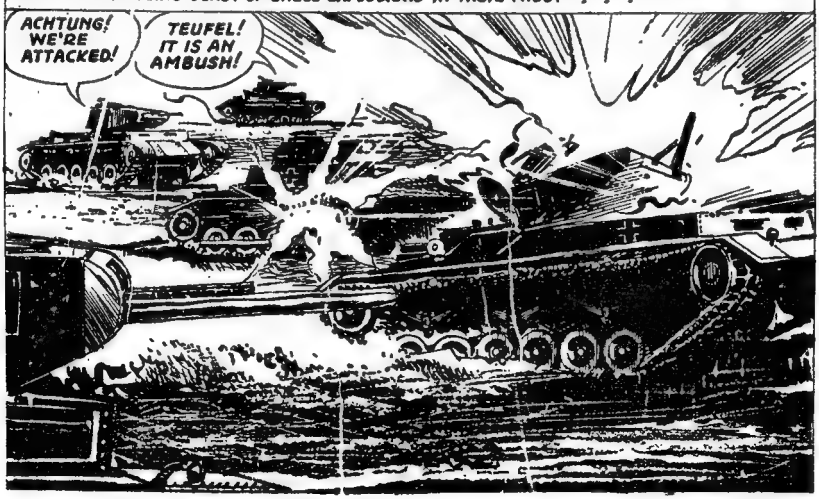
DAVE FELT TOO SICK AT HEART TO JOIN IN THEIR TALK, FOR THE HORROR OF HIS MEN'S USELESS SACRIFICE WEIGHED HEAVILY ON HIS MIND.

AFTER WHAT SEEMED INTERMINABLE HOURS, THEY HEARD GUTTURAL ORDERS TO HALT. MULLER HAD CALLED A SHORT REST AND A FEW MINUTES LATER, HE APPEARED AT THE BACK OF THE TRUCK IN HIGH SPIRITS . . .

THE INEXORABLE CHASE WAS RESUMED AND DAVE RUCKWORTH FELL INTO A BLACKER GLOOM THAN EVER.

AN HOUR LATER, OBERSTLEUTNANT MULLER, STILL LEADING THE FURIOUS DESERT DASH, SIGHTED THE TELL-TALE CLOUD ON THE HORIZON THAT MUST UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY HIS QUARRY.

TERSE, EXCITED ORDERS WERE RELAYED TO THE TANK COMMANDERS AND THE ENEMY FORCE SURGED FORWARD. NEXT MOMENT, THERE CAME A SUDDEN, HEART-STOPPING CRASH OF GUNFIRE AND THE WHISTLING BLAST OF SHELL EXPLOSIONS IN THEIR MIDST . . .



LYING IN PATIENT WAIT ALL THIS TIME HAD BEEN A SQUADRON OF CHURCHILL TANKS. NOW THEY HAD DRAMATICALLY ANNOUNCED THEIR PRESENCE WITH A COMBINED SALVO OF SIX-POUNDER GUNS THAT RIPPED THE GERMAN FORMATION APART.

NOT ONE GERMAN GUN HAD ANSWERED THAT CRASHING VOLLEY WHEN A SECOND SLAMMED HOME. MULLER'S COMMAND TANK WAS ONE OF THOSE HIT THIS TIME.

ALL FORGOTTEN IN THE GERMAN PANIC, THE BRITISH PRISONERS WERE FREE TO WATCH THE FINAL CONVULSIONS OF THEIR FORMER CAPTORS.
WHAT A CARVE UP! THAT'S KNOCKED THE SNEER OFF THOSE JERRIES' COCKY FACES!

AT LAST WHEN THE FUNERAL PYRE OF ENEMY TANKS WAS CLIMBING DARKLY TO THE DESERT SKY, DAVE RUCKWORTH WAS SPUN ROUND BY A VOICE HE HAD COME TO LOATHE . . . CAPTAIN WAYNE'S.
DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER, RUCKWORTH?
WAYNE! I OUGHT TO KNOCK YOUR TEETH IN!

FOR ANSWER, THE CAPTAIN CALMLY MOTIONED THE FURIOUS YOUNG OFFICER TO CALM DOWN . . . HE BEGAN TO TALK . . .

FOR THE FIRST TIME, DAVE HEARD OF THE SEALED ORDERS THAT HAD GIVEN WAYNE NEW INSTRUCTIONS.

ESCORTED BY THE BRITISH TANKS, THE TIRED REMNANTS OF WAYNE'S ORIGINAL PARTY ONCE AGAIN TOOK TO THEIR TRUCKS. AS THEY TRAVELLED TOGETHER, WAYNE HAD ONE LAST ADMISSION TO MAKE . . .

WHEN THEY REACHED THE MAIN BODY AND COLONEL COLLIER CAME STRIDING TO MEET THEM, DAVE RUCKWORTH WAS LEFT IN NO DOUBT THAT WHATEVER THE SACRIFICE OF GALLANT LIVES, THEY HAD NOT DIED IN VAIN.

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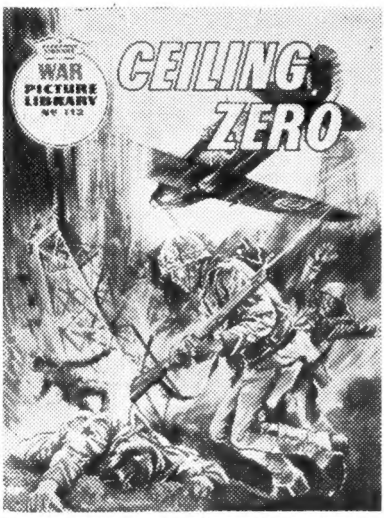
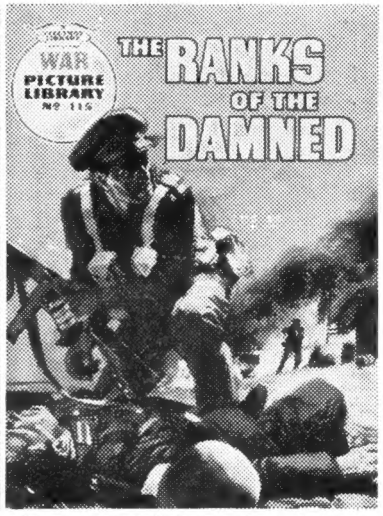


The jungle sky was a place of hatred and savagery where survival went to the fittest.

No. 115.—THE RANKS OF THE DAMNED



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